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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [KDEM](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: PDAS CHENEY CHALLENGES ARAB LEAGUE SECRETARY

GENERAL'S INSISTENCE ON "PALESTINE FIRST"

Classified by Charge Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In a May 24 meeting with Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa, NEA PDAS Elizabeth Cheney

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pressed the Arab League to demonstrate its commitment to real political reform among its member states, and to support Gaza disengagement. Moussa insisted that the Arab League is committed to pushing political reform--including in cooperation with the USG--but also reiterated his familiar position that political reform in the region will not be possible without a solution to the Israel-Palestine issue. Cheney assured Moussa of the USG's commitment to resolving the conflict, and pressed him to encourage the Arab League to avoid using the Israel-Palestine conflict as an excuse to avoid reform. End summary.

12. (C) In response to an invitation from Moussa, PDAS Cheney, accompanied by the Charge and poloff (notetaker), met with Moussa on the evening of May 24. (Moussa's chief of staff Hisham Youssef, and his press spokesman, Hossam Zaki, also joined the meeting.) Moussa opened with his familiar refrain that the road to reform in the Arab world lies through Palestine. Returning to a theme he had publicly stated at the recent World Economic Forum meeting in Jordan, Moussa insisted that there could be "no Arab Spring without a solution to the Palestinian issue." According to Moussa, "any reasonable peace will do." He noted that in a recent interview with the Jerusalem Post he had clearly stated the Arab League's commitment to its 2002 Beirut Declaration, which committed the Arab League to "turning the page and considering the conflict ended."

13. (C) In response, PDAS Cheney noted that there had been much talk about the peace process for many years, including by Arab governments who have sometimes used the issue to deflect attention from the need for reform in their own countries. At the same time, these governments have often not lived up to their commitments to provide financial support for the Palestinian people, for example. She suggested Moussa should do more than talk about the importance of peace. Specifically, she urged Moussa to support actions currently underway -- most importantly, Gaza disengagement, necessary for progress on the Roadmap. Moussa argued that the USG must play an "honest broker" role regarding the "litmus test" of Israeli settlements. Moussa said that Arab League members are troubled that Israel may move Gaza settlers to other settlements in the West Bank. PDAS Cheney responded that the Secretary General, given his unique position in the region, also had a responsibility to be "an honest broker." She suggested that Arab League support for Gaza disengagement would be an important "litmus test" in this regard.

14. (C) Moussa asserted that Arab League members have "two number-one priorities: reform and progress on the Palestinian question." As evidence of the Arab League's commitment to reform, Moussa described several new programs including a pan-Arab parliament and a move to provide special consultative status for Arab NGOs that wish to affiliate with the Arab League. He also mentioned an initiative to support the provision of identity cards and voter registration for women in six Arab countries. Moussa said he would coordinate and cooperate with the USG on these and other reform projects. PDAS Cheney welcomed his agreement, saying, "Together, we have the potential to be a very powerful team." (Note: In reply to PDAS Cheney's question, Moussa said an Arab League staffer was assigned to work on reform issues. We will follow up to identify the staffer and explore opportunities for cooperation on reform projects. End note.)

15. (C) PDAS Cheney closed by saying she was heartened to learn that the Secretary General shared the USG goals of expanding freedom and working for peace. Moussa offered his unreserved support for the former, and said that he also supported the latter, but that his "terms of reference originate from the Beirut Declaration." PDAS Cheney said that she looked forward to future meetings with the Secretary General. Moussa also welcomed the prospect of future meetings, and noted that they would continue to include "an honest difference of views." PDAS Cheney responded that she expected nothing less.

16. (U) PDAS Cheney has cleared this cable.

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GRAY